

2006 Report from the Legislature

To our constituents of the 4th Legislative District

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Dear friends & neighbors,

State lawmakers have convened in Olympia for a legislative session that began on January 9 and will run 60 days.

We are both very proud to bring **the needs and priorities of our community before the Legislature** in Olympia. **We are your advocates** in the Washington State House of Representatives.

One of **our top priorities as your state representatives** remains **creating and preserving jobs**. We need to make it easier for employers – especially smaller ones – to grow, hire workers, and offer health insurance to families in our district. This means **reforming state government** to eliminate duplicative regulations and streamline others. **This also means not increasing taxes on employers and families.**

Another one of our priorities is finding solutions to local challenges. Whether it's negotiating with the state Department of Ecology or helping local governments in various ways, we look forward to taking these issues head on.

Finally, the state operating budget is one of the most important responsibilities we have as your state representatives. We were very disappointed last year when a budget was passed that grew state spending by 12 percent while raising taxes by hundreds of millions of dollars. We share our budget philosophy later on in this newsletter.

To better serve you, please keep the calls, letters, and e-mails coming. **We value your advice** and want to help address your concerns.

If you happen to be in the Olympia area during the session, please let us know – we always look forward to seeing our constituents from the 4th District. Have a great 2006!

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

Rep. Lynn Schindler

Rep. Lynn Schindler

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2006 To our constituents of the the 4th Legislative District



Spending your tax dollars wisely

Disappointing state operating budget

Our state is riding the momentum of national economic conditions and economists predict we will have a **\$1.4 billion surplus for our state operating budget** by the end of fiscal year 2007. This was not forecasted when the budget was written during the 2005 session.

We voted against the 2005-07 budget because it **increased state spending by over 12 percent** from the last budget cycle and **increased taxes on families and employers by hundreds of millions of dollars.**



Being responsible with our supplemental budget

The supplemental budget is a mid-course adjustment to our state's two year operating budget. Normally, adjustments are minor and accommodate state needs, but don't impact policy. We hope this is the case in the 2006 legislative session, but **we're hearing of plans to add "pork" to various proposals.**



We believe in **fiscal responsibility** and refraining from going on a state "spending spree," so to speak. **We oppose any unnecessary spending of taxpayer dollars.**

Taxpayers believe **we should save our extra money and prepare for future budget deficits** should the economy go into a down cycle again. Now is a great time to create a **permanent "rainy day" fund** – a provision to the state Constitution that would require lawmakers to put a percentage of money away every budget cycle to protect the taxpayers during tough economic times.

There will always be philosophical differences in terms of spending your tax dollars, yet ours remains constant: **we believe in funding all our essential state services, while looking for savings in the process.** Government needs to be **accountable for taxpayer dollars.** We think our state can do a better job of this.

Keeping our neighborhoods safe

Nothing is more important than to feel safe in our own homes and neighborhoods. Unfortunately, there are **emerging problems** that prevent many people from this comfort.

This year we **will work to find solutions** to a number of public safety problems, including three very serious ones: **sex offenders, identity theft, and methamphetamines.**

Sex offender sentencing and tracking

It's important to toughen penalties for sex offenders so there are fewer of them roaming our streets. We are proposing a **"Jessica's Law Plus,"** which would require that the worst convicted sex offenders already on our streets to wear a global positioning device. This would allow law enforcement officials to **track their locations** when necessary.

Washington's "Jessica's Law Plus" would also toughen penalties and sentencing for a whole list of sex crimes not previously included in the "two-strike" crimes list. "Jessica's Law" is named after the 9-year-old Florida girl who was kidnapped and murdered by a registered sex offender that law enforcement couldn't find.





Identity theft is a growing problem

Identity theft occurs when someone uses personal information such as your name, Social Security number, credit card number, or other identifying information without your permission, to commit fraud or other crimes. In Washington, **only two state law enforcement officers are assigned** full time to investigate identity theft crimes – woefully inadequate to keep up with the new cases that occur weekly.

We support legislation that **cracks down harder on identity theft** and **boosts the state's resources for investigating these crimes**.

Dealing with makers of meth and other illegal drugs

Those who make and deal illegal drugs are **draining our local law enforcement budgets**, and their mobile drug labs are **creating environmental problems** in our district.

We support legislation that **tightens penalties for drug makers** and **limits access to drug-making materials**.

Making health care more affordable, accessible

We want to make health care less of a burden on family finances. We also want to help people who are having trouble obtaining it at all.

This session we will look at not only malpractice reform, an issue two ballot measures failed to address in the 2005 election, but also **health care reform**.

It's important the Legislature look at ways to **lower health care costs for working families and small employers**, without putting the burden on taxpayers. We believe the private market is capable of helping, but **too many mandates and regulations** prevent it from doing so.

We tried to push through a **comprehensive health care reform package** in the 2005 session, but the majority party rejected our efforts. We continue to support these concepts and hope they get a better reception this session:

- health savings accounts;
- removing certain costly health insurance mandates; and
- small business tax incentives for employers who offer health care to employees.

Local mental health funding

Our current state operating budget reduces funding for mental health treatment and facilities in our district. **We are working to have this funding restored** to original levels to ensure these programs are sustainable in the future. We hear the concerns of those involved in the treatment of mental health in our district and are **working for solutions that do not rely on new or increased taxes**.



Helping small employers

Our state's employers still face cumbersome regulations and an overall **unfriendly business climate**. These conditions have caused many employers to downsize, reduce benefits, or close shop all together.

More must be done to help our employers and we support the following ideas that we believe will send the right message and **provide certainty to any employer** who is in Washington, or looking to locate here:

- allow small businesses to provide health care coverage through more plan choices;
- restore the important unemployment insurance reforms passed in 2003 and repealed in 2005; and
- remove costly and unnecessary regulatory hurdles through one-stop licensing, information, and assistance.



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Resources on the Internet

If you need information about state government, you may find the following Internet sites to be great resources. Or, you can always call or e-mail our offices.

hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/crouse/pressroom.htm and
hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/schindler/pressroom.htm
– offer our views and news releases on various issues.

access.wa.gov – provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing car tabs, and much more.

leg.wa.gov – offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you'd want to know about the Legislature.



Printed on recycled paper

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